**Lesson #1: Lane Entry**

We all love to have our own lane when we swim, but inevitably some will come along in the middle of a workout and decide to share your lane even if there happens to be an empty one a few feet away (Rule #1.1: Always take an empty lane before you step into an occupied one. Rule #1.2: If you ever decide to share a lane, find someone your own speed to share it with).

For those of you already in the lane, proper etiquette requires that you begin to circle-swim in a counter-clockwise position. Swimming side by side is dangerous because there is a 50 percent chance that one of you will forget to stay on your side and swim headlong into your partner. There also is the likelihood of a third swimmer arriving soon (Murphy's Swimming Law: If you have a lane to yourself, it will be short-lived).

For those of you entering the lane of another swimmer, enter on the right side and waituntil the swimmer has acknowledged you at the wall, or passed you and started circle-swimming. Rule #1.3: DO NOT stop the swimmer to herald your arrival (as newsworthy as this piece of information is to the free world, the said swimmer could be in the middle of a terrific set that need not be interrupted). They will notice you standing on the side of the lane and alter their course accordingly.

**Lesson #2: Merging and Passing**

As you both begin to share the lane, be aware of each others orbit and trajectory. Avoid practicing breaststroke and butterfly as it can be messy in a mid-set collision (of course you may opt to chase your partner into another lane with that 6-foot-wide butterfly wingspan, but good manners prohibit me from endorsing that here).

When passing your lane partner, tap them on the left foot and proceed up the middle of the lane. Rule #2.1: If you are being passed, DO NOT speed up and attempt to start a drag race. This is a pet peeve and a surefire way of encouraging a not-so-civilized way of passing the next time around.

Should a third swimmer enter the lane (and they surely will as soon as you achieve a comfortable rapport with your first intruder), the same rules apply. However, it becomes imperative that you all pay more attention to each other than before, because passing can get tricky down the middle of a lane shared by three people.

Remember, if you pick the correct lane, you shouldn't be passing or be passed very often in the first place.

**Lesson #3: The collision**

No matter what, the day will come where you have an unpleasant collision. It is an unavoidable hazard in swim training, and your best defense is to be prepared.

If you notice a swimmer with no sense of direction and hazardous technique (their arms straight, or their kick scissoring every which way), avoid their lane altogether (and you swimmers with bad technique, start reading my column and improve your strokes). If a swimmer is wearing paddles, avoid their lane if there are other options. If you are unfortunate enough to bang heads, arms or fingers (and fingers can be the most painful nicks of all), look to see if the other swimmer has stopped and if so, assess the damage. If they keep swimming, it means your mishap is just that; your mishap; it doesn't faze them, so get over it.

If they are as startled and anguished as you are, it serves you both well to apologize to one another and ask if you are both OK. This is a fundamental difference from car accidents, where you look to blame the other party for insurance purposes...see how civilized swimming can be when compared to the real world?

With both swimmers acknowledging some sort of pain, egos are stroked and the business of swimming can be resumed and further inter-swimmer violence avoided.

Although the above three lessons are brief and just the tip of the iceberg, they clearly indicate that the sport of swimming need not be as mindless and impolite as, say, basketball.

In addition, the rules above only apply to solo swimming; that is, people who swim by themselves in a non-organized training regimen. The rules and manners of masters team swimming are even more complex than this, and will warrant their own space in next week's column.

In the meantime, the above tips can help you become a better lady or a gentleman, regardless of whether you are a champion. And it might just keep you out of court!